

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Lockwood & Co: The Creeping Shadow

Written by

Jonathan Stroud

Published by

Corgi Childrens

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

CORGI BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Corgi Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.

www.penguin.co.uk
www.puffin.co.uk
www.ladybird.co.uk

Penguin
Random House
UK

First published 2016

001

Text copyright © Jonathan Stroud, 2016
Cover artwork copyright © Alessandro 'Talexi' Taini, 2016
Interior illustrations copyright © Kate Adams, 2016

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Set in 12/18 pt Adobe Caslon
Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–552–57315–3

All correspondence to:
Corgi Books
Penguin Random House Children's
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable
future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book
is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

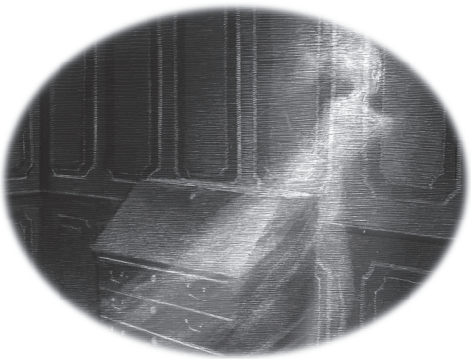
FSC
www.fsc.org
MIX
Paper from
responsible sources
FSC® C018179

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

Contents

I:	Two Heads	1
II:	The Ealing Cannibal	79
III:	Lost and Found	177
IV:	The Cursed Village	309
V:	The Iron Chain	399
VI:	An Unexpected Visitor	491
Glossary		531

Property of Penguin Random House 2016



1

I knew at once, when I slipped through into the moonlit office and eased the door shut behind me, that I was in the presence of the dead. I could feel it in the prickling of my scalp, in the way the hairs stirred on my arms, in the coldness of the air I breathed. I could tell it from the clots of spiders' webs that hung against the window, thick and dusty and glittering with frost. There were the *sounds* too, centuries old; the ones I'd traced up the empty stairs and hallways of the house. The rustling linen, the crack of broken glass, the weeping of the dying woman: all were louder now. And there was the sudden intuition, felt deep in the pit of my gut, that something wicked had fixed its gaze on me.

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

Mind you, if none of *that* had worked, the shrill voice coming from my rucksack might also have given me a clue.

'*Eek!*' it cried. '*Help! Ghost!*'

I glared over my shoulder. 'Cut it out. So we've found the phantom. There's no need for you to get hysterical.'

'*She's just over there! Staring, staring with her hollow sockets! Ooh, now I see her grinning teeth!*'

I snorted. 'Why would any of that bother you? You're a skull. Calm down.'

I shrugged the rucksack off onto the floor and flipped up the canvas top. Inside, radiating a smoky greenish light, was a large glass jar with a human skull clamped in its depths. A hideous translucent face pressed against the glass, nose bent sideways, poached-egg eyes flicking to and fro.

'*You asked me to raise the alarm, didn't you?*' the skull said. '*Well, this is me raising it. Eep! There she is! Ghost! Bones! Hair! Ugh!*'

'Will you please shut up?' In spite of myself, I could feel its words having an effect on me. I was staring into the room, unpicking its shadows, hunting for an undead shape. True, I saw nothing, but that brought little comfort. *This* particular ghost worked by special rules. With feverish speed I began rummaging through the rucksack, pushing the jar aside, sifting through salt bombs, lavender grenades and iron chains.

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

The skull's voice echoed in my mind: '*If you're looking for the mirror, Lucy, you tied it to the back of the rucksack with a piece of string.*'

'Oh . . . yes. So I did.'

'*So you wouldn't forget where it was.*'

'Oh, yeah . . . Right.'

The eyes gleamed up at me as I fumbled for the string. '*Are you panicking?*'

'Nope.'

'*Just a little bit?*'

'Certainly not.'

'*If you say so. She's creeping closer, by the way.*'

That was it. No more small talk for me. Two seconds later I had the mirror in my hand.

It was a peculiarity of this Visitor that it could not be seen directly, even by agents with decent psychic Sight. It was said to be the spirit of the murderous Emma Marchment, a lady who had lived in the building in the early eighteenth century, when it was a private house and not the offices of an insurance company. After dabbling in witchcraft and allegedly being responsible for the deaths of several relatives, she had been stabbed by her husband with a spear of glass from her own smashed dressing-table mirror. Now she appeared only in reflections – in mirrors, windows and polished metal surfaces – and several

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

employees of the company had recently lost their lives to her surreptitious touch. Hunting her was a ticklish business. Our team tonight had brought in hand mirrors, and there'd been a lot of slow shuffling backwards, and much wide-eyed peering over shoulders into dark corners. Me, I hadn't bothered with any of that. I'd trusted my senses and followed the sounds, and not reached for my mirror until now.

I held it up and angled it so that I could see the reflection of the room.

'*Nice bit of kit*,' the skull said. '*Real quality plastic. Lo-o-ve the pink ponies and rainbows on the rim.*'

'So I got it from a toy store. It was all I could find in the time available.'

Moonlight flashed confusingly on the glass surface. I took a deep breath and steadied my hand. Instantly the image stabilized, becoming the bright grid of the window, with cheap curtains hanging either side. Beneath the sill was a desk and chair. I panned up, round and down, seeing only a moonlit floor, another desk, filing cabinets, a hanging plant suspended from the darkly panelled wall.

The room was just a boring office now, but once it would have been a bedroom. A place where tempers snapped, old jealousies flared, where intimacy contorted into hatred. More ghosts have been created in bedrooms

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

than anywhere else. It didn't surprise me to find that Emma Marchment's death might have happened here.

'I don't see her,' I said. 'Skull, where is she?'

'*Far right corner, half in and half out of that bureau thing. Got her arms stretched wide like she wants to hug you. Eee, but her nails are long . . .*'

'What are you tonight, a Yorkshire fishwife? Stop trying to freak me out. If she moves in my direction again, I want to know about it. Otherwise, quit warbling.'

I spoke decisively, projecting confidence. Show no fear, show no anxiety: give the restless spirit nothing to feed on. Even so, I wasn't taking anything for granted. My left hand hung at my belt, midway between my rapier and the magnesium flares.

I snatched a glance away from the mirror. Yes, there was the corner with the bureau. It was very dark; hardly any moonlight reached it. Strain as I might, I picked out nothing standing there.

So, let's see . . . I returned to the mirror and panned it slowly round, over the desks, past the hanging plant, following the panelled walls, until it reached the bureau.

And there it was. The ghost, swinging shockingly into view.

I'd been expecting her, yet I almost dropped the mirror.

A bone-thin figure, white drapes falling from it like a

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

shroud. A livid face hanging in a cradle of smoke-plume hair. Black eyes staring, white skin clinging to the skull like melting wax. You could see the skeletal neck; the stains on the dress, the jaw unnaturally agape. Her hands were raised, the fingers bent towards me.

The nails *were* very long.

I swallowed. Without the mirror, or the skull to guide me, I might have wandered unawares into those clutching arms.

'Got her,' I said.

'*Have you, Lucy? Good one. Now, do you want to live or die?*'

'Live, please.'

'*Call the others.*'

'Not yet.' My hand was shaking again, the mirror wobbling. I kept losing sight of the pale form. I cleared my mind. I needed a moment's peace for what I had to do.

'*I know you're annoyed with them*,' the skull went on, '*but this isn't something to tackle on your own. You need to get over your little tiff.*'

'I *have* got over it.'

'*Just because Lockwood—*'

'I'm not worrying about Lockwood. Now will you shut up? You know I need absolute silence for this.' I took a deep breath and double-checked the mirror. Yes, there was the face: a ragged smear haloed by a candyfloss swirl of hair.

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

Had it stolen closer to me? Maybe. It seemed a tad bigger. I shook the notion away.

The skull stirred again. '*Tell me you're not going to do your silly thing! She was an evil old biddy whose spirit only wishes you harm. There's no need to reach out to her.*'

'I *am* doing my thing, and it's not at all silly.' I raised my voice. 'Emma?' I called. 'Emma Marchment? I see you. I hear you. What do you want? Tell me. I can help you.'

That was how I always did it. Everything boiled down to basics. The Lucy Carlyle Formula™ – tried and tested many times over the long dark nights of the Black Winter. Use their name. Ask the question. Keep it simple. It was the best strategy I'd devised so far for getting the dead to speak.

Didn't mean it always worked, mind. Or worked the way you wanted it to.

I watched the white face in the centre of the mirror. I listened with my inner ear, blanking out the sceptical snorting of the skull.

Soft sounds drifted across the bedroom through an abyss of time and space.

Were they words?

No. Just the flap of a bloodied nightdress and some shallow, rasping death-sighs.

Same old, same old.

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

I opened my mouth to try once more. Then—

'. . . *I STILL HAVE IT* . . .'

'Skull, did you hear that?'

'*Only just. She's a bit husky. Still, give her credit. It's amazing she can say anything at all with her throat torn open.* What *does she still have? That's the question . . . Blisters? Bad breath? Who can tell?*'

'Shh!' I made a grand and welcoming gesture. 'Emma Marchment – I hear you! If you desire to take your rest, you must first trust me! *What is it that you have?*'

A voice spoke close behind me: 'Lucy?'

I cried out, ripping my rapier clear of its Velcro clasp. I spun round, sword held ready, heart throbbing against my chest. The door to the bedroom had opened. A tall slim figure stood there, silhouetted by swirling torchlight and clouds of magnesium smoke. One hand was on his hip; the other rested on his sword hilt. His long coat hung rippling around him.

'Lucy, what *are* you doing?'

I snatched a glance back, stabilizing the mirror just in time to see the faint, pale shape, like a breath-smudge in the air, pass through the panelling behind the bureau and disappear.

So the ghost had retreated into the wall . . . *That* was interesting.

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

'Lucy?'

'All right, all right, you can come in.' I sheathed my sword and beckoned – and into the room strode Ted Daley, team leader (second class) at the Rotwell Agency.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining. There were many advantages to my new life as a freelance psychic operative. I could choose my jobs. I worked whenever I wanted. I could build up a little reputation of my own. But one definite drawback was that I could never pick my fellow agents. Each case I took on, I had to fit in with whoever worked for the company that had hired me. Of course, some were OK – decent, professional and competent. Others . . . well, they were more like Ted.

Seen at a distance, in a soft light, with his back turned, Ted was tolerable; closer inspection was invariably disappointing. He was a gangly, sad-eyed youth, long in all the wrong places, with a permanently semi-open mouth hanging above a scrawny neck. Somehow he always gave the impression of having just swallowed his chin. He had a reedy voice, and a tight and nit-picking manner. As team leader, he had nominal authority over me that evening, but since he ran with his arms flapping like a goose, had the personality of a limp stick of celery, and crucially didn't seem particularly psychic, I more or less ignored him.

'Mr Farnaby wants a word,' he said.

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

'Again?'

'Wants an update on how we're doing.'

'Not a chance. I've cornered the ghost: we deal with it now. Bring the others in.'

'No, Mr Farnaby says—' But it was too late; I knew they'd be loitering at the door. Sure enough, in an instant two nervous shapes had slipped into the room, and presto, our team was complete in all its glory.

It wasn't exactly a breathtaking line-up. Tina Lane, Rotwell field agent (third class), was a wan girl, peculiarly colourless in a way that suggested that all her warmth and vibrancy had drained out through a hole in one of her toes. She had very pale hair like bleached straw, bone-white skin and a slow, faint way of talking that made you lean ever closer to her in an effort to catch what she said. When you realized it wasn't worth listening to, you leaned slowly back again and, if possible, continued in the same direction until you'd left the room.

Next up: Dave Eason, Rotwell field agent (third class). Dave had slightly more to him, in a damaged-goods sort of way. He was a dark-skinned kid, squat, burly and belligerent, like an angry tree stump. I guessed he had strong natural abilities, but his experiences with Visitors had left him skittish and too free with his rapier. Tina had a scar where Dave had struck her on a previous occasion; and

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

twice that very evening *I'd* almost been skewered when he'd caught sight of me in his mirror out of the corner of his eye.

Wan Tina, mediocre Ted and jumpy Dave. Yeah, that was my team; that's what I had to work with. It's a wonder the ghost didn't just evaporate in fear.

Dave was pumped up, tense. A nerve twitched in his neck. 'Where've you been, Carlyle? It's a dangerous Type Two we're dealing with here, and Mr Farnaby—'

'Says we have to stick together,' Ted interrupted. 'Yes, we've got to keep in strict formation. It's no good you arguing with me and waltzing off. You have to listen to me now, Lucy. We've got to report back to him straight away or—'

'Or,' I said, 'we could just get on with the job.' I'd been kneeling, closing up my rucksack; the others didn't know about the skull, and I wanted it to stay that way. Now I got to my feet, put my hand on my rapier hilt and addressed them. 'Listen, there's no use wasting time with the supervisor. He's adult. He can't help us, can he? So we use our own initiative. I've found the probable location of the Source. The ghost disappeared into the wall just over there on the far side. Didn't the old story say that after she was stabbed Emma Marchment fled from her husband into a secret room? Then they broke in and found her lying dead amongst all her pots and poisons? So my guess

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

is we'll find her room behind that wall somewhere. Join me, and we'll put an end to this. OK?'

'You're not our leader,' Dave said.

'No, but I know what I'm doing, which is a nice alternative.'

There was a silence. Tina looked blank. Ted raised a bent finger. 'Mr Farnaby says—'

It was hard to keep my temper under control, but I'd got better at it these last few months. So many agents were like this: lazy, ineffectual, or just plain scared. And always so concerned about their supervisors that they never acted like proper teams. 'Here's how I see it,' I said. 'The secret door's by that bureau. One of us finds it and breaks through; the others stand guard with mirrors. Any funny business from the ghost, it's salt bombs and rapiers all the way. We get the Source, we shut it down, and we're out of here before Farnaby gets halfway through his hip flask. Who's with me?'

Tina blinked around at the silent room. Ted's long white hands worried at the pommel of his sword. Dave just stared at the floor.

'You can do this,' I persisted. 'You're a good team.'

'*They so aren't*.' That was the skull, in whispers only I could hear. '*They're a bunch of knock-kneed losers. You know that, right? Ghost-touch is too good for them.*'

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

I didn't acknowledge the voice. My smile didn't falter, nor did my purpose. They may not have answered, but they weren't arguing with me any more, so I knew I'd won.

After five minutes' further hustling I'd got us all set up. We'd pushed some desks and tables to the side, to give us a good free space. A protective arc of iron chains lay on the floor, closing off the corner with the bureau. Within this we had three lanterns glowing by the wall. I was there too, my mirror hanging at my belt, my rapier in my hand, ready to hunt for secret doors. My three companions stood safely beyond the barrier with their mirrors in position, angled so that they had coverage of the whole area where I'd seen the ghost. I only had to look back at them to check that I was safe. Right now the only thing that was reflected in the mirrors was me – just me three times and nothing else.

'OK,' I said, keeping the encouragement going, 'that's perfect. Well done, everyone. I'll start looking. Keep those mirrors steady.'

'*I admire your confidence*,' the skull said from my rucksack. '*These idiots can barely walk and breathe at the same time, yet you're relying on them to keep you safe. I'd say that's risky*.'

'They'll do just fine.' I spoke so low that no one else could hear, meanwhile shining my torch on the old dark

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

panelling. What would it be? A lever? A button? Most likely a simple pressure-release board that, when pushed, allowed a weighted door to open. It had been closed a long time; maybe it had all been sealed up, in which case we'd need to smash it in. I changed the angle of the beam of light. Now one section of the wood seemed slightly shinier than the rest. I pushed at it experimentally. Nothing stirred.

Or at least, nothing *natural* did. But my inner ear caught a gentle cracking noise close by, like glass shards being trodden underfoot.

The woman had been stabbed to death with broken glass. My stomach twisted, but I kept my voice upbeat. 'Anything in those mirrors?' I said. I shoved at the panel again.

'No, you're good. All's clear.' That was Dave, tones flat with tension.

'It's getting colder,' Ted said. 'Getting colder *really* fast.'

'OK.' Yes, I could feel the temperature draining away; the wood was freezing to the touch. I struck the panel with cold and sweaty fingers, and this time felt it move.

Glass crunched.

'*She's coming back, pulling herself out of the past*,' the skull said. '*She doesn't like you being here.*'

'Someone's weeping,' Tina said.

Property of Penguin Random House 2016

I'd heard it too: a desolate, angry sound, echoing in a lonely place. And with it came the rustling of approaching linen – sodden fabric, wet with blood . . .

'Watch those mirrors, everyone,' I ordered. 'Keep talking to me . . .'

'All's clear.'

'Getting colder . . .'

'*She's very near*.'

I shoved again, harder – and this time it was enough. The piece of wood swung in – and out seesawed a narrow door: a section of panelling cracking free of the wall, wreathed in cobwebs and trailing dust.

Beyond it? Only darkness.

I wiped the sweat from my face; both hand and brow were freezing. 'There we are,' I said. 'As promised – one secret room! Now all we need to do is go inside.'

I turned back to the others, gave them all a beaming smile –

And looked into their mirrors.

There was my pale face, reflected three times. And close behind it *another* face, its skin melting off the bone. I saw pale hair like clouds; I saw bared teeth as small and red as pomegranate seeds. I saw the black and glinting eyes; and, last, in the split second I had left, the five clawed fingers reaching for my throat.